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SUBJECT: DEMONS IN EDEN - LYDIA CACHO CASE UPDATE

REF: MEXICO 0326

¶1. (U) Summary. The case of Lydia Cacho, the independent journalist arrested in December on libel and defamation charges, exploded back into the headlines on February 14 when the media released excerpts of a tape containing alleged phone conversations in which businessman Kamel Nacif is heard plotting with Puebla Governor Mario Marin (PRI) to have Cacho jailed in retaliation for her associating Nacif with Jean Succar Kuri, an accused pedophile (Reftel). The tape contains numerous profanity-laced exchanges between voices that appear to be those of Nacif and various officials involved in the case. In one conversation, Nacif refers to Marin as his "hero" and promises to send him two bottles of cognac to show his appreciation. In other conversations, Nacif discusses paying the judge on the case to assure a conviction as well as paying a guard in the jail to arrange for Cacho to be raped during her detention. The Governor's office denies that it is his voice on the tape and stated that someone must have fabricated the recording using sophisticated technology. Numerous public figures, including the three leading presidential candidates, have called for a federal investigation, and PRD candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) and PAN candidate Felipe Calderon have called for Marin to resign. This evolving story could definitely have a political impact beyond the borders of Puebla - something PRI candidate Roberto Madrazo surely hopes does not happen for the sake of his presidential aspirations. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On December 16, Puebla state police arrested Cacho in front of her office in Cancun and transported her by car over 1,000 miles to the city of Puebla to face libel and defamation charges brought by Nacif. The charges against Cacho stem from her 2005 book, "The Demons of Eden," in which she alleges links between a child prostitution ring and a number of government officials, politicians, businessmen, and drug traffickers. While Cacho did not directly implicate Nacif of any wrongdoing, she did identify him as a friend of Succar Kuri - who is at the center of a child prostitution and pornography ring. (Note: Succar Kuri is currently being held in Arizona and is fighting extradition back to Mexico. End note.) A judge released Cacho on bail after 30 hours in detention, and the libel charges were later dropped. Cacho still faces defamation charges, but the case was recently removed to the State of Quintana Roo.

A Valentine's Day Gift for Cacho

¶3. (U) On February 14 the local media first reported on the contents of a tape that contained alleged phone conversations in which Nacif, a prominent Puebla-based businessman, plots with several state government officials to jail and intimidate Cacho. The tape, left anonymously earlier in the week at the Mexican daily La Jornada and W Radio, contains about one hour of profanity-laced conversations allegedly recorded via a tap on Nacif's phone line. In the

conversations, a voice that sounds like Nacif's discusses plans to have Cacho jailed and raped. The recording also contains conversations in which Nacif purportedly discusses efforts to help fight the extradition of Succar Kuri from the U.S. to Mexico.

¶4. (U) The Human Rights poloff met with Cacho February 9 to discuss Trafficking in Persons in the Cancun area. During the conversation, the HR poloff asked Cacho about the status of her own case, to which she replied that she was pleased that it was removed to Quintana Roo and felt that she now had a chance of getting a fair trial. She also said that she stood by assertions made in her book and that her case demonstrated the high degree of corruption at all levels of government. Cacho responded to the news of the tape by saying in an interview with the Mexican daily El Universal that the tape showed that Nacif "bought off the attorney general, the judge, and the governor himself with a couple of bottles of imported cognac. To me it is contemptible. The only thing left for Mario Marin, if he has any dignity, is to resign."

It Could Get Even Uglier

¶5. (U) The story has been widely reported in the news for three days and numerous high-level politicians and public figures have been calling for an investigation and Marin's resignation. Calderon demanded the prosecution of any wrongdoing - even if committed by a governor or a powerful businessman. AMLO called for the intervention of President Fox (PAN) to resolve Cacho's case and for Marin to resign. Madrazo continues to reject the idea that Marin would be involved in any such plot against Cacho, but he said that there should be an investigation into not only the contents

MEXICO 00000895 002 OF 002

of the tape, but the source as well.

¶6. (SBU) In an unrelated meeting that took place just as the scandal was breaking, PRI Senator Genaro Borrego told poloff that Marin's "inconvenient" comments about Cacho would further tarnish the PRI's image and undermine what little chance it had of regaining Los Pinos - especially coming in the aftermath of the revelations about former PRI presidential hopeful Arturo Montiel's suspect financial transactions. Madrazo admitted in Wednesday's edition of La Jornada that the PRI had lost 14 points in the polls due to the Montiel scandal.

Comment

¶7. (SBU) There is definitely the potential for serious political and criminal consequences as a result of the intense media attention to this story. Rights groups have been saying from the start that Cacho's arrest was a clear example of the continued ability of the powerful and politically connected to manipulate corrupt government officials and the judicial system for their own benefit. If Marin (an ally of Madrazo) continues to be at the center this high-profile scandal, the PRI will have an even harder time convincing the public that it is no longer the party of corruption and special interests. And, while AMLO has made some strong public statements calling for Marin to resign, he may tone down his rhetoric given he probably would not want to review memories the PRD scandals in which high ranking party officials were caught on videotape accepting bribes. As for the PAN, a federal investigation and prosecution could be a golden opportunity for President Fox, and consequently Calderon, to show that the PAN is the anti-corruption party and that the PRI still has not abandoned its old ways.